

History of Scott County, Iowa. Chapter II. First Settlement of Buffalo Township

Willard Barrows

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.



This work has been identified with a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0](#).

Recommended Citation

The Annals of Iowa, 1(1) (Jan. 1863): 15-21

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

We now enter upon our history more in detail, considering each township, beginning with Buffalo.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST SETTLEMENT OF BUFFALO TOWNSHIP.

In 1833, Capt. Benjamin W. Clark, a native of Virginia, who had settled and made some improvements on the Illinois shore, where the town of Andalusia now is, moved across the Mississippi and commenced a settlement upon the present site of the town of Buffalo, and was probably the first settler on the soil of Scott county. He had been Captain of a company of mounted volunteer Rangers in the Black Hawk War, under Gen. Dodge. Here, in Buffalo, he made the first "claim," erected the first cabin, broke the first ground, planted the first corn, and raised the first produce in the county. His nearest neighbors at this time upon the Iowa shore, then called the "Black Hawk Purchase," were at Burlington and Du Buque.

The first stock of goods ever opened in the county, was at Buffalo, by a Mr. Lynde, of Stephenson, now Rock Island. The first orchard planted, and the first coal ever discovered and dug in this county, were by Capt. Clark, in 1834. The first public Ferry across the Mississippi, between Burlington and Du Buque, was at Buffalo, and for several years, "Clark's Ferry" was the only place of crossing in all this region of country. In the early part of the year 1835, he erected a public house, which is still standing, a large frame building two stories high, which, at that time, was considered a great enterprise. He brought the lumber from Cincinnati, at a cost of sixty dollars a thousand feet.

In 1836, Capt. Clark laid out the town of Buffalo, it being the first town regularly laid out in this county. He succeeded in building up quite a village; but there was much need of flouring and lumber mills, and in 1836, he erected, near the mouth of Duck Creek, the first saw mill in the county, or in this part of Iowa; and although it was on a small scale, and quite inadequate to the wants of the settlers who began to seek homes beyond the Missis-

ssippi, yet it proved of the greatest public benefit, and served the people for many years.

The Ferry was established at Buffalo, while Capt. Clark lived at Andalusia, before he moved across the river. The first ferriage > collected by him, after he had completed his flat boat, was attended by the following amusing circumstance. Late one evening, a company of French traders, who were returning from the Iowa river to the Trading Post on Rock Island, encamped on the bank of the river where the Hotel now stands in Buffalo. They heard the report of the Captain's intention to establish a ferry across the river at this point, and feeling somewhat inclined to ridicule such an enterprise, they called loudly for the ferry boat, saying that they had a drove of cattle to cross, an assertion perfectly ridiculous in itself, as nothing in the shape of cattle nearer than buffalo or elk had ever appeared on the western banks of the Mississippi river. But the Captain was not to be trifled with. He had made ready his boat. His ferry was established, and being a man of bold, and most unflinching, uncompromising sternness and perseverance, he rallied his men, manned his boat with some eight men and boys, and very quietly crossed over to answer the continued calls of the noisy Frenchmen. It was a very dark night, and as the oars were plied to the ponderous flat boat, Capt. Clark stood at the helm steering his rude craft over the swelling waves of the Mississippi with nothing to guide him but the blaze of the camp fire and noise of the company on the Iowa shore, meditating most undoubtedly in a frame of mind not the most serene. When nearing the shore, the traders on discovering him set up a most uncourteous roar of laughter, turning the whole matter off as a joke; called them fools, and told the captain they had nothing to ferry, and that he might return to the Illinois. But Capt. Clark's anger was now raised to the highest pitch. He to landed his boat, and with his men marched into the camp of the w insolent Frenchmen, and demanded ten dollars as a fee for ferriage. No man who knew Capt. Clark ever wanted to parly with him when his usually mild temper was aroused by insult. The party soon became satisfied that, under the circumstances, it was their best policy to pay up. The great difficulty now was that they had not ten dollars in the company, but very willingly offered two bolts of calico, which, among Indians, at least, was considered legal tender. This was accepted and taken as the first ferriage ever received in Scott county. Capt. Clark and his

party returned, having taught the wild traders one of the first lessons of civilization.

Capt. Clark claimed the honor of being the father of the first white child born in Scott county. This son, David H. Clark, now a resident of Polk county, in this State, was born in Buffalo, the 21st of April, 1834.

For many years the town of Buffalo attracted much attention, and bid fair to become a serious rival to Stephenson, then just merging into existence. But Davenport and Rockingham were soon laid off, and a ferry being established between Davenport and Stephenson, by Mr Le Clair, travel was directed to that point, and the division of the country into counties left Buffalo in no enviable situation. It had been the most prosperous town in this region of country, doing a large business with the emigrants to the Territory, who were then beginning to settle up and down the river and along the Cedar valley, furnishing grain and provisions of all kinds to the new comers. Capt. Clark spent much time in showing emigrants the country and assisting them in making claims, and probably did more towards the early settlement of this country than any other man that ever came into it. He died at Buffalo, Oct. 25th, 1839.

To show the prospects of Buffalo, as a point of interest at that day, we might relate a circumstance that occurred in reference to the value of town lots. After Davenport was laid out, Maj. Wm. Gordon and some others, proprietors, called on Capt. Clark, and offered him an even exchange of forty or sixty lots in Davenport for an equal number in Buffalo. But the Captain declined, regarding it as a poor offer, as it probably looked to be at that time.

It will be seen, by reference to the map of Scott county, that it lacks a township in the south west corner, (No. 78 N. R. 1 E.), of being square. As it has always been a mystery to many, particularly to the new comer, why this township should have been set off to Musatine county, while it so naturally belonged to Scott, I will here explain.

In the first Territorial Legislature, which convened at Burlington, in December, 1837, an act was passed creating the boundaries of Scott county, as well as many others. Unfortunately for the well-being of many a town site and village, this honorable body had too many speculators in town lots among its members. Dr. Reynolds, then living three miles above Bloomington, now Mus-

catine, being a member, had laid off a place called Geneva, upon which all his efforts for the county seat were centered. The manner and extent, in laying off the counties, were of course, to decide the destiny of many a town site which had been made especially for the county seat. The object of Dr. Reynolds was to press the upper line of Muscatine county up the river as far as possible, so as to make Geneva central, and lessen the chances of Bloomington, which was an applicant for favor. The Davenport and Rockingham member, Alex. W. McGregor, Esq., knew that if the Scott county line ran too far down the river, Buffalo, then a rival, and by far the most populous and important town above Burlington, would stand too great a chance, so that a compromise was entered into, and this township was given to Muscatine county, which gives to our county its present ill-shaped appearance.

Buffalo, with all her just claims, was sacrificed, by placing her in the lower end of the county. Dr. Reynolds' grand scheme was frustrated, for Bloomington got the county seat for Muscatine county, and Davenport and Rockingham "doubled teams" on Buffalo, got the county seat, and then fought for choice of location, as will be noticed under its proper head. This was the killing stroke to Buffalo. Davenport ultimately received all the benefits derived from the trickery and corruption of legislative enactments, while Geneva, Montpelier, Salem, Freeport, Mouth of Pine, and some half dozen more towns that were laid out along the Mississippi river from Muscatine Island to Davenport, "went under," carrying with them all their visionary schemes for greatness and power.

Buffalo township has more timber land than any other in the county. There are thousands of acres now covered with a growth that has arisen since the first settlement, that will cut from twenty to fifty cords of wood to the acre. It is estimated that there is five times as much timber in Buffalo township, as there was at the time of the first settlement in 1834. A fact showing how easily timber may be produced if cared for, and the annual fires kept out of the woodlands.

There is another very important item to appear in the history of this township. Coal was first discovered here in 1834, and as early as 1835 and 1836 was dug and sold to steamboats at the mouth of Bowling's Creek, which empties into the Mississippi about

half way between Buffalo and Rockingham. The first bank opened was about half a mile up this Creek, and was worked to considerable extent by Dr. A. C. Donaldson, who settled in 1837, near its mouth. Still higher up this creek, some three miles, Benj. Wright and Capt. E. Murray, from Zanesville, Ohio, opened a bank in 1838, and furnished coal to Davenport and Rockingham, for fifteen cents per bushel; and from that day to this, mines have been opened and worked in almost every part of the township, until at the present time, more than twenty-five coal mines are open and ready for work. The most extensive now in operation, are near Buffalo, and belong to Capt. W. L. Clark & Co., who are getting out about one thousand bushels per day. They are preparing to lay a rail track to the river, and when completed, the company will be able to deliver on the bank, or in barges, from two thousand and five hundred to four thousand bushels per day. Their road will accommodate many other banks now opened, and that will be opened along the track. The coal now obtained is far superior to that formerly dug, and is said to be a better article for making steam, and for other purposes, giving off more flame and igniting very readily. Experienced steamboat men, who have examined this coal, and used it, say that one thousand bushels of it will go further, and make more steam, than twelve hundred bushels of the Rock River coal.

Capt. W. L. Clark, son of the original proprietor of Buffalo, is now a resident of Davenport, but holds large interests of lands and coal banks in this county. The very lands claimed by his father in 1832, soon after the Black Hawk war, are still in the possession of Capt. W. L. Clark.

James M. Bowling, from Virginia, now a resident of Davenport, settled in Buffalo township, the 4th of July, 1835, at the mouth of Bowling's creek. He purchased the "claim" of one Orange Babbett, the quit claim deed to which has recently been presented to the State Historical Society by Mr. Bowling. This property now belongs to Capt. Leroy Dodge. Mr. Bowling commenced farming, in 1835. That fall, he went back to Virginia, married, and returned, in 1836, with his wife and two sisters. In 1837, he had the prospect of a fine crop, but the Indians, who still loitered about the country, were encamped upon this creek. In June, there were some five hundred Indians living near him, and very troublesome. They set fire to the prairie and burned up the fence

surrounding his corn, which was at the time six inches high. The Indian horses then ate much of it, and he was compelled in the heat of summer to cut timber and make rails to enclose his field again; but, notwithstanding all his misfortune, he succeeded in raising a very good crop. The Indians, however, were a constant annoyance to him.

In his absence, on one occasion, a lot of Indians came to the house, and Mrs. Bowling having the doors fastened by putting a gimlet over the latch, with his sisters, remained in silence for some time, until they pushed out the chinking of the cabin near the door, and running in their arms, pulled out the gimlet, when Mrs. Bowling and sisters braced themselves against the door, and by main strength kept them at bay, until, weary of the effort to make an entry, they left the premises. This is but one instance among many of the trials and hardships to which the first settlers were exposed, and through which they passed with patience and toil.

Although Buffalo became almost extinct, after her defeat and downfall, yet, in 1855, it was re-surveyed and mostly purchased by the Germans who settled in and around the town. It has a steam mill, three stores, an Episcopal church organized, and one of Disciples, or Christians. Both societies worship in the school-house. Buffalo now contains about five hundred inhabitants, and is one of the most beautiful town sites on the Mississippi river.

Many of the first settlers of this township are still living at Buffalo, enjoying in affluence the sure reward of their early struggles. One among the many who have retired from the more active pursuits of life, and now enjoy life's comforts, is Capt. Leroy Dodge, who emigrated to Iowa, in 1856, from the State of New York. He was, for many years, a pilot on the Mississippi, and then commander of steamboats. Having secured some four hundred acres along the river and bluff above Buffalo, he built him a pleasant cottage on the banks of the river, and turned his attention to agriculture, principally to stock raising, of which he has some noble specimens. In 1852, he represented Scott county in our State Legislature. He was an unflinching Democrat, and loved the cause of human rights.

Among others who settled, at an early day, in this township, were Joseph and Matthias Mounts, Elias Moore and Andrew W. Campbell. Mr. Campbell was among the most enterprising of the early settlers, having opened a large farm on the bottom land of

the river. He sold it to Henry C. Morehead, at an early day, and removed to the prairie, near where the town of Blue Grass now is, where he opened another large farm that now belongs to his heirs. He was elected, in February, 1838, one of the County Commissioners, it being the first election ever held for officers under the county organization. He also filled other places of responsibility and trust. Being fond of travel and adventure, he frequently took excursions into the interior of Iowa, while it was yet in possession of the Indians, seeming to forget all business cares and enjoy very much the solitude and loveliness of our western wilds. In the spring of 1850, he crossed the plains to California and returned by way of the Isthmus that fall. The following summer, he again set forth for California, by the overland route, in company with a son and a married daughter, whose husband was in California. His health had been for years somewhat impaired and his constitution broken. On Green river, in the Great Basin of the Rocky Mountains, he sickened and died, and his bones are left to moulder in the cheerless desert, with no lasting monument to point the weary pilgrim to his lonely grave.

(CHAPTER III.

ROCKINGHAM TOWNSHIP.

In ascending the river from Buffalo, we next enter upon Rockingham township, the settlement of which began simultaneously with that of Le Clair, Princeton and the Groves. This township, comprising the bluffs of the Mississippi, is somewhat broken, and was formerly covered with heavy timber. The bottom lands that are above overflow, are excellent farming lands. The settlement was begun at Rockingham in the fall of 1835. Col. John Sullivan, of Zanesville, Ohio, James and Adrian H. Davenport, Henry W. Higgins, and others, purchased the claim that had been made upon the present site of Rockingham, which is directly opposite the mouth of Rock river.

Like many other places selected in those days for town sites, Rockingham "possessed many advantages," the most prominent

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.